



Study Group Scenarios

Study groups can be an effective way to reinforce your learning, practice explaining concepts, and maintain social connections during busy points in the semester. However, even when guidelines are clear, there might be times where another group member suggests something that goes against those guidelines. In some instances, the suggestion may ask group members to participate in a practice that would be considered academic misconduct.

This could include asking a group member to see their work, sharing their work with the group, asking to divide up an individual assignment between the group or asking another member to complete their work for them. These conversations can be uncomfortable to have, especially when the group member is stressed or anxious having left the assignment to the last minute.

Look for suggestions on how to address these situations in the Scenarios below.

When others request to see your work

Brian is struggling to make a start on his assignment. He knows that if he could just see how someone else has structured it, he will be able to start writing. Brian reaches out to his study group and asks the members if they would be willing to share their assignments. He assures them that he is not looking to copy the work, he just needs some ideas of where to start and then he will be ok on his own.

The issue

It is understandable to want to help a friend in need, however, students need to remember that we are all influenced by what we read, see and hear. This means that after Brian has read your paper, he will have been influenced by the writing and he may accidentally start to incorporate that into his own paper. He may accidentally copy your structure, parts of your introduction or conclusion. He may use your unique terminology, the way you have critiqued certain research or how you embed thoughts. This is likely to be noticed by your instructor.

The implications

As a student you must not knowingly or carelessly make your academic work available to other students so that they are able to use it to copy. Remember that helping another student to commit academic misconduct is also a violation of the Student Academic Misconduct Policy. This type of academic misconduct is termed unauthorized assistance. Despite wanting to help your friend you will also be complicit and also face sanctions.

What should happen

Encourage Brian to reach out to the instructor or T.A. as soon as possible. Ask him to make an appointment with a writing support tutor to brainstorm ideas which will help him get started. You could also point out useful content from your lectures. It is natural to want to help, but always stop short of handing over your written work.

Dividing up the Assignment

Marc, Lindsey and Abdul are working together on a lab in Biology. They are assigned to work together all term and decide to set up a study group so that they can easily meet outside of class. The instructions indicate that they must work together to complete the experiments and then write and submit the lab reports individually. Marc suggests that they take turns writing up the report each week and share it with each other. Each partner could then reword the report a bit and submit it.

The Issue

It would be impossible for the instructor to know what content belongs to each group member. The group is misleading the instructor by completing the report as a group. Each member of the group is not demonstrating their own academic ability. If another course builds on the knowledge gained from these lab reports, then the students will not have acquired the knowledge they need to be successful.

The implications

This is unauthorized assistance and is a violation of the Student Academic Misconduct Policy. Students who chose to complete individual assessments as part of a group risk the instructor noticing the similarities between the group members work, even if you try to make some changes to make the work appear different. In this situation all students in the study group may be found responsible for academic misconduct.

What should happen

The reports must be completed individually. Students can get help from the instructor or TA. For help with study strategies, the Student Success Centre offers appointments with academic strategists and study skills workshops.

Using File Sharing Websites

Jennifer has been incredibly busy and so doesn't get a chance to even look at her calculus assessment until the weekend before. She realizes that there is more to this assessment than she first thought. Feeling desperate, she reaches out to her study group and asks for help. One of the study group members tells her about file sharing websites. Jennifer googles the title of the assessment and finds a site that offers her access to instructor material for her course. She pays the fee, accesses the site and finds all of the solutions to her assessment being made available for her. Jennifer copies all of the answers and submits the paper.

The Issue

Jennifer is not demonstrating her own academic ability by copying the answers. Jennifer is trusting people that she does not know to provide her with the correct answers. If a further paper builds on this one, Jennifer is missing vital knowledge. File sharing sites also violate the intellectual property rights of instructors. Jennifer should reach out to the instructor or TA for help in understanding and starting her assessment as soon as possible. If time management is a contributing factor, then the assignment tracker or Student Success Centre workshops would be very helpful.

The implications

Although Jennifer is feeling stressed, by accessing these solutions online through a file sharing website she is disadvantaging all those other students who have worked honestly to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in the assessment. This type of behaviour will be considered as Unauthorized Assistance. If Jennifer is found responsible for academic misconduct, she could face a sanction that risks her future with the university.

What should happen

If you are in Jennifer's study group encourage her to reach out to the instructor or TA for help in understanding and starting her assessment as soon as possible. If time management is a contributing factor, then tell them about the assignment tracker or Student Success Centre workshops. It can be difficult to report other students, especially if they are your friends, when you become aware of behaviour that is violating the Student Academic Misconduct Policy. However, their behaviour is unfair and all other students that are working fairly are at a disadvantage. You are encouraged to report all cases of academic misconduct by reaching out to your instructor to make them aware of the situation and to allow them to take the necessary steps to investigate.